

obsolete character. Would not that rather tell against your argument, supposing they were furnished with the newest ones?—Yes, to a certain extent.

194. In the event of the work being tendered for, is there any chance of a combination?—Not the slightest. Competition is too keen for that.

195. Is it not your opinion that the Government Printing Office do their work more expeditiously than any other office?—I cannot answer that question. I have not had any opportunity of judging as to the speed with which work is got out. I think the whole question might with advantage be thoroughly inquired into by means of a Commission, as witnesses have not had time to look into it properly.

196. *Mr. Samuel.*] I would like to know more about the class of work you would like tendered for?—Customs forms, and numbers of other departmental forms, of which large numbers are used throughout the colony. If I had the sample forms here I could point them out to the Committee.

197. Is it not a fact that a great deal of the profits in the printing trade come from the paper?—Yes; and many of the printing firms are very large importers of paper, and have the best facilities for buying in the Home market, enabling them to do work at cheap rates. I am not aware under what system the Government supplies are obtained.

198. *The Chairman.*] When you speak of the competition being so keen, you do not mean to say tenders would be sent in at prices which would entail a loss?—No; I do not think anybody would tender at prices which would involve a loss.

199. Then, supposing there is a profit, is it not right that the colony should get the benefit of the collective profit?—Yes; but I contend that private offices can do the work at a cheaper rate than it can be done at the Government Printing Office.

200. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] You think there is sufficient competition in the trade to prevent a combination?—Yes, certainly.

Mr. ALFRED GEORGE HORTON examined.

201. *The Chairman.*] What is your name?—Alfred George Horton.

202. What are you?—I am a printer, and part proprietor of the *New Zealand Herald*.

203. This Committee has been appointed to inquire into one definite question. Will you give us your opinion as to whether any part of the printing done in the Government Printing Office could be done at a cheaper rate by tendering for it?—Some of it, I think, might.

204. Can you tell us what portion of it?—Some of the forms might be done in any of the private offices, such as ordinary work or “stock” work. I think that this kind of work mentioned might be taken at a cheaper rate than it is at present charged by Mr. Didsbury. A portion of the printing, of course, consists of tables, and would not pay to give to private offices, because of the numerous alterations and corrections required to be done here in Wellington.

205. Have you any of the work picked out—that which would yield the most profit?—No; I cannot say that I have. It is “stock” work, of course, which would pay us to take at low prices in slack times, when the machines are idle, so as to keep them occupied.

206. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] Would not that argument apply equally well to the Government Printing Office?—I think not, because most of their pressure of work is during session, and they know exactly when their slack time is. In private offices the demands are more uncertain.

207. *The Chairman.*] Is it necessary that there should be a Government Printing Office?—Yes, clearly.

208. Then you do not think these “stock” forms should be retained to fill up the time in that office, so that its large plant should not lie idle and unproductive?—I think you might very well relieve the office of much work, as has been done in railway work. I cannot give the Committee a very clear opinion on any particular class of work that I would recommend to be tendered for: it would take a long time, and is a matter for careful examination.

209. How would you suggest that the work should be tendered for?—I would suggest that it would pay the Government to have, say, three experts, to examine the whole question, and to select what kind of work might be given out to tender; because, of course, there is a certain class of work which could not be given out.

210. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] Do you think, from your knowledge of the trade, that the Government could replace their staff each session?—Yes; certainly. There are plenty of men obtainable.

211. Of good character?—Yes. I am not speaking of foremen or skilled experts of labour; but simply compositors or printers.

212. *The Chairman.*] Men who could set-up the Registrar-General's returns?—Any ordinary job.

213. Could you give any idea of the proportion of compositors out of the whole who could set up such tables as the Registrar-General's returns?—No. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the casual labour obtainable to answer that.

214. Do you know the class of work that is given out in England outside the Government printers'?—Telegraph and other forms; and in Scotland some of the supplies for general office use are given out in the towns in which the forms are required. The Government contract printers do all the work of importance or relating to Bills, &c.

215. *Mr. J. B. Whyte.*] Do you think there is sufficient competition to prevent anything like a combination occurring with the private offices?—Yes: it is just as keen here as it could be in any country.

216. Still, you would not expect to lose?—No; but we have better appliances than the Government possess.

217. In what respect is the place defective?—In the machinery; for instance, I saw some very old cutting-machines—they ought to have self-clamp guillotines: whilst the office is much scattered; and they have to carry their work from one place to another. To work to the best advantage you must have plenty of room and good light, as well as good plant.